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THE LYCÉES OF FRANCE¹

II

To get an idea of the distribution of time throughout the day and the week, the following schedule of the recitations of two classes in the Lycée St. Louis may be consulted on the following page.

It will be seen from these schedules that the student is virtually confined from eight o'clock in the morning to half-past four in the afternoon, and that his recitation hours average from a little more than four to a little less than six for six days in the week. Remembering that these classes are upper classes, and that the French youth matures earlier than the American youth, even then the program seems astonishingly severe. I made this comment to Professor Morel of the Lycée Louis le Grand, who replied that it was a fact that the French student is seriously overworked. "I have a nephew," he said, "who is preparing to enter the École polytechnique, and he has to pass through what is really a dangerous physical ordeal during the coming school year. I am a member of a committee appointed to suggest a method of lightening the curriculum, but we have been able to do but little. The obstacles in the way of reform are very great. For example, it has been urged by an influential party that we ought to introduce the out-door athletics of the English public schools. Well, we have tried that. One of the largest and best equipped lycées in France was established in a suburb of Paris to give French boys an education modeled after English lines. It was built to accommodate eight hundred students, but now has only two hundred, and has practically failed to gain any hold upon the people. Why has it failed? Chiefly because we have no younger sons to send knocking about a colonial empire. Nor would fathers or sons desire that career. Moreover, they do not like the English knock-about games. Then, if we attempt

¹ Concluded from p. 559.

DISTRIBUTION OF CLASS WORK, LYCÉE ST. LOUIS. FIRST SEMESTER, 1898

Class	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday	No. of classes	No. of hours
Second Modern	8-10, French $2\frac{1}{2}$ - $3\frac{1}{2}$, Geog. $3\frac{1}{2}$ - $4\frac{1}{2}$, French	8-10, Physics 10-11, English $2\frac{1}{2}$ - $4\frac{1}{2}$, German	8-10 Math. $2\frac{1}{2}$ - $4\frac{1}{2}$, French	8-9 $\frac{1}{2}$, Drawing "Graphique" 9 $\frac{1}{2}$ -11, Drawing	8-10, Chemistry $2\frac{1}{2}$ - $4\frac{1}{2}$, Math,	8-10, History 10-11, German $2\frac{1}{2}$ - $4\frac{1}{2}$, English	15	25
	8-10, Math. 10-12, French $1\frac{1}{2}$ - $2\frac{1}{2}$, Chem. $2\frac{1}{2}$ - $4\frac{1}{2}$ Hist.	8-10 Math. $1\frac{1}{2}$ - $2\frac{1}{2}$, Geog. $2\frac{1}{2}$ - $4\frac{1}{2}$ German	8-10, History $2\frac{1}{2}$ - $4\frac{1}{2}$, Math.	8-10, Math. 10-12, Math.	8-10, Math. 10-12, Drawing $1\frac{1}{2}$ - $2\frac{1}{2}$, French $2\frac{1}{2}$ - $4\frac{1}{2}$, Geog.	8-10, Physics 10-11, German 11-12, Drawing $2\frac{1}{2}$ - $4\frac{1}{2}$, Math.	19	33

to reduce the curriculum, we are told that we are making it impossible for our students to compete with the graduates of the Jesuit colleges, or to pass successfully the competitive examinations of the public service. Indeed, with thousands of lucrative posts to be obtained only through the gate of competitive examinations, it would make little difference whether we reduced the studies, or not; for our young men would labor as hard as ever to pass. You see that all this makes football practically out of the question."

What M. Morel says throws light on the controversy that is going on between the party he mentions, the so-called anglophiles, and the educational nationalists. The controversy has been precipitated largely by M. Demolins, who has carried his ardor for reform into practice even to the point of sending his children to England to be educated, and the cause he advocates has been championed in the halls of the Sorbonne by a well-known educator. Nevertheless, enthusiasts who would medicine the educational system of France with "*phosphate de fer anglo-saxon*" are not taken very seriously by their colleagues. This is the opinion of M. Monod, the eminent editor of the *Revue Historique*, who certainly is as well qualified to judge of the availability of the English school system as is M. Demolins. The philosophical objections to radical reform are well stated by M. A. Claveau in a recent article in *Le Figaro*. "The Frenchman," he says, "is before all a being of ideals and sentiments. The ties of flesh and blood, love, friendship, family, country, all the generous passions make him sedentary. . . . You may be able, perhaps, to denationalize him a bit on the surface, and you have still—an idealist! You will never be able to construct a pure positivist, a brutal egoist, a pitiless realist, a Stanley or a Cecil Rhodes."

This is all perfectly true, but, nevertheless, the French schools do need *phosphate de fer anglo-saxon*—not indeed to make colonists of their youth, but to make them strong to bear the burdens weighing upon the French nation at home.

It would be unjust to leave off the discussion of the distribution of time in the program of the lycée with only adverse criticism. In its tendency toward long and rather infrequent recitations in a specified subject, it deserves to be imitated by us—not

to the extent of two-hour recitations, perhaps, but certainly to a reasonable increase in the time of our scant forty-five and fifty-minute classes. As to infrequent recitations in a given subject, it is not necessary to say much, since many of our schools have found such an arrangement of classes conducive to the development of sustained interest, and stronger memory, not to speak of enlarged opportunities for the proper correlation of studies.

If studies and their ordering have been the only subjects of discussions thus far, it has been because what could be said about them would, perhaps, best indicate the character of the teaching in the lycées; for men who know what to teach, and when, generally know *how* to teach. Class room technique is, moreover, so much a matter of temperament that it is rather evasive. Nevertheless the teachers of the lycées have a method, formed under the influence of a national school of pedagogy, representing advanced and authoritative pedagogic thought, a school most vitally connected, too, with the practical workings of the lycées. To some extent the teacher's method is prescribed by the council of education in the "instructions" and "conseils généraux" that are found scattered throughout the printed courses of study, and in this connection I cannot refrain from quoting one or two of them as indicative of the spirit of French teaching.

On the teaching of grammar: "It is expected that the rules will be taught in all cases from usage. . . . The professor will constantly connect his teaching with examples furnished by spoken and written language."

On the teaching of science: "For this same reason of the general education of the soul, the professor will not neglect the history of science. The student has occasionally less to gain from the exposition of a truth than from the history of its discovery. The scientific genius at work furnishes to youth, through its initiatives, its doubts, through its errors as well as through its successes, an instruction eminently suggestive and moral. In this way, in short, the professor may bind his lessons to those of the professors of letters, history, and philosophy. All in all, in expounding the laws and the evolution of nature he makes known. . . . the laws and the progress of the human spirit. He

collaborates in this manner with the courses in history and the humanities."

From these brief quotations, one catches gleams of the ideals of the class room. Some of its workday traits may, perhaps, be caught from a brief report of a visit to "assist" at a class in history in the Lycée Louis le Grand.

The recitation (it was by the fourth form of the classical course) was practically the first of the semester, and its conduct was particularly valuable as showing the staying qualities of the work in Greek history of the previous year. It began with topical questions which were designed chiefly to enable the professor to learn how much of the subject the students had been able to carry over the long summer vacation. The topics presented ranged from the chryselephantine statues of Phidias to the institutions of Sparta, and the boys, who would average thirteen years of age, acquitted themselves very well, their excellent memories testifying to the value of infrequent recitations. Naturally, after so long an interval of play, there were not many complete answers, but the student was not permitted to resume his seat until the topic given him had been exhausted, either by his own recitation or with additional suggestion and comment from professor and class. The review finished, the professor lectured on the geography and the races of Italy, the students taking notes from his discourse quite as if they were undergraduates in an American college. This was rather surprising, for in America second year high-school students would not be expected to have the selective judgment necessary to taking notes off-hand from a discourse dealing with the institutions of the Etruscans. But in the French and the German schools students are trained very early to report lectures in their notebooks, and more of such training in our secondary schools would lessen the break between them and the college. The mental processes of reporting a lecture are the same as those of reading a text, and it ought not to be much more difficult for a student to get a lesson from the living voice than from a book; and that it is not would seem to be proved by the ease with which even the younger boys in the lycées and gymnasia report

lectures. The class just mentioned lasted two hours, yet there were no unusual evidences of fatigue or of loss of interest.

The text-book is not much in evidence in the class room of the lycée. The student gets his education from men and things more than from books. This was impressed upon me especially in the work in geography and in mathematics—the professor was always himself the text. In a class in descriptive geometry in the Lycée Henri IV., for example, after the students had reviewed the demonstrations of the previous recitation, the rest of the hour was devoted to the lecture and the presentation of problems to be solved by the students.

Texts are used, of course, in the languages, and they are illustrated and annotated as they are with us. But in the lycées, the work of a class in language does not seem to be confined between the covers of a book. The students do not seem to be oppressed with a sense of studying Latin and Greek—they are reading Caesar and Homer. One of the most enjoyable hours in the French schools was spent at a recitation in Horace in the Lycée Henri IV. The professor and his young men were like a group of friends enjoying and expounding together a favorite author.

This matter of texts suggests the subject of the use of illustrative material in the lycées. One searches in vain for it in the class room. I looked about the history rooms, particularly, for photographs, casts, maps, etc., but the walls were as austere as those of a monastery. However, an apparatus for the illustration of history is not really necessary in the class rooms devoted to that subject, for, in the modern course at least, the work in the history of civilization and art is amply illustrated by photographs, plans, pictures, and casts, and the professors of history, language, and the fine arts are particularly directed to collaborate their work. French educators are certainly fully alive to the value of illustrative material. I found a one-roomed country school in a village of three hundred inhabitants well equipped with maps and charts, and with such collections of woods, stones, seeds, grasses, coins, etc., as would be helpful to a community of peasants. As for the physical and chemical

laboratories of the lycées, they are thoroughly equipped. The physical laboratory of the Lycée Louis le Grand, for example, contains a Rhumkorf coil valued at five thousand dollars.

Matériel, however, has been kept well subordinated to *personnel*. One will not find in France structures with more of marble corridor and modern-pattern elevator than of good teaching and culture. In culture, experience of life, and training, the professors in the lycées impress one as men approaching the stamp of the men that we have in our colleges and universities. There are not as many young men as we have in our American schools, nor as many as one would expect to find in the English schools. This is probably due in part to the fact that there are no athletics in the lycées. Their faculties would be better balanced if they contained such instructors as are found in many English and American schools—young men who can do for their students what the graduate of Sandhurst does for the raw recruits of his command in Kipling's story of the Brushwood Boy. Perhaps it is for the lack of such instructors that all attempts to introduce athletics into the French schools have failed, but more likely the true statement of the cause of this failure is to be found in the most serious charge that can be made against the continental schools. It is this—that they impose the strain of severe study upon the student at the wrong period of his school life. Overworked as the boys in French and German schools are—and in the lycées they are not only overworked but underfed—it is no wonder that their undertoned physiques inspire a morbid dread of the healthy asceticism of athletic training, and that the sudden and unaccustomed freedom of university life is an irresistible temptation to dissipation. Undoubtedly a student's secondary-school life should inure him to discipline and labor, but would it not be better if he were also made somewhat familiar with the freedom that is later to test so severely his manhood and his capacity for work? Again, is not leisure as essential to the boy as to the man? How can the boy "find" himself if he is forever performing imposed tasks? Is it logical to devote the years of childhood to the development of self-activity and self-knowledge, only to crush them out in youth through a program of studies,

which, however admirably its content may be arranged to the end of stimulating thought, is yet so large and so severe that it overwhelms spontaneous thinking ?

If students must be kept busy, it may be done through other activities than studies. Many of our best schoolmen regard the so-called "institutional" work of secondary schools as one of their most valuable features ; for in conducting, under proper control, debating, athletic, and social organizations, students learn to handle affairs with self-reliance and a sense of responsibility. In the French schools there is little opportunity for this sort of thing, and for this, and other obvious reasons, the French class room has too little of the flavor of individuality. The French boy at recitation is amiable, respectful, and very well informed, but his manner lacks the tone of self-reliance and fearless individuality that marks the recitation of the American boy. This contrast calls to mind, and contains in part an explanation of, General Shafter's characterization of the American soldier in his account of the Santiago campaign.

Speaking of the behavior of his men in the final attack, he says : "They were intelligent American soldiers ; each one was thinking of what he was doing, and not depending for all his thinking on the officers over him. In that respect the soldiers of the American army are superior to those of any other army in the world." To temper and strengthen this self-reliance, this power of independent thinking, so that, in spite of the growth of cities and industrialism, we shall not lose our inheritance from the pioneers, is one of the great duties of the American teacher. The temptations to overload the curriculum proceeding from the attractiveness of foreign models, the requirements of universities, and from ideal courses of study, should be resisted. Something should be left to nature, to the student himself, and above all to the American spirit.

Nevertheless the work of correcting and testing our teaching by the, as yet, superior teaching of Europe must go on. Hitherto we have taken lessons chiefly in England and Germany ; but, in secondary education at least, there is much to be got from a study of the lycées of France.

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